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Bard

CHASTITY

Chastity has something to do with it —
a brick book store in Ithaca
a girl examining my knuckles thirty
years ago I have the feel of her hands
still in mine how does it happen
she said they looked like horses
yoked to some great chariot

the delicate skin of almost
sends its thrill through years and years
a tremble in time's secret cities
as Time would have said in the sad
old days when Time was a speaking
role, the last of our taboos, our Now
is boundless, aporia of advertisers,
democracy of want

Lisa her name was
from some snowy country
where rabbits still flee foxes.

12 September 2003

TO THE READER

I'm glad you love me for my images
they're all I have left of you
caught in my breath, speech
consoles the frightened child, darling,

tell me this thing is actually this thing.
As in French to say *the fingers* means *my fingers*
so when I say the green rake standing by the irises
I mean your flowers, your dirt, your daylight,

my despair my knowing you as you know me.

12 September 2003

IN DARK INSCRIPTION

When you write in the dark all
kinds of things don't happen
but things get said you didn't
know enough to mean before
your hand stumbled into truth

the way dreams are etymologies
of the words that live inside the
mystery you keep wrapped up in your skin,
you keep coming up against the root.
You go there blind, you strike
against it by the weight of being

alone in your body in the dark.
The root of one thing is the fruit
of another, tree grows out of tree
and always closer to the time
you land on earth at last
the moment the old prayer calls
the hour of our death Amen.

12 September 2003

SAPLINGS

Tenderness turns into touch
touch to roughness, rough
to hurt and hurt to grief
and grief remorse and tenderness.

Of course I'd never hurt you
but the hurt gets done.
When you marry the King
of the Cannibal Islands

you never know the frontiers
of his appetite,
savage tenderness, slim
trees break rocks.

12 September 2003

TESTAMENT

Offer some of it
not all
the wood pigeons
kick their feet
through seed hulls
and find some seed

shave ginger
for your tea
it warms the belly
just where the air
begins, the skin
and where I end.

12 September 2003

[for the Sacred Earth discourse]

You people come here and think you've always been here. You forget right away. You forget where you came from, and what you brought with you. You think you're naked. You think you need clothes. You have skin to keep something in. Always keeping something, always saving.

What are you keeping? You have organs inside you. Doesn't that seem strange to you, that in your interior, instead of a huge dark abyss networked with feelings, with stars, instead you find (when you look inside, as you have been doing for the last few hundred years), when you open one of you up you see a delicatessen of weird meats, wets and densities all packed together with no room for air. No light in there. No space for art and feelings and the gods of Egypt. Organs. Just organs. And surgeons, those auto mechanics of the soul, pick and choose among these slimy opportunities, cutting one or another way, rearranging. Here, this is your problem. And coiled inert at the base or core of this bag of goods, the huge tunnels filled with shit.

So ask yourself some time even a little question like: where does the shit come from? What comes out is never the same as what comes in. An odd tomato seed or two may make it through. but really, you don't shit pizza or beer, or whatever it is you people eat. Then when you've worked on that a while, ask: Why organs? Who put them there? Would we be better off without them? Are they born with us? Do we come from them? Are we, even the cutest of us, just a bunch of Louis Vuitton bags to carry our organs around in? Our organs! Are they us?

If they are yours, why don't you know them better? Why did you have to wait a few thousand years for Ambroise Paré to start spreading us open and naming what he found? Why do you need some sawbones from Karachi to confide the state of your own liver, anybody at all to tell you what's inside this very body you're sitting in, or is it sitting with, now?

The human's colossal ignorance of life astonishes even the most traveled spaceling.

If you belong to your organs, on the other hand, what do they want of you? Is civilization just a conspiracy of spleens and secret pancreases to reproduce their kind, animates working on some inconceivable agenda of their own? And you, who talk so much and listen so little, you're just vectors, hosts, valiant Saint Christophers hauling these mysterious flabby entities around?

[Sorry for all his questions. They are, as all questions are in essence, aggressions. But that's what Bouledios wants to talk about today. Sometimes he's impatient with people, or maybe it's just me. Try to forgive me. He doesn't care if you forgive or not, but only hopes you'll be happy, or so he says. So he says:]

If you guys know so little about the nifty little cold cuts in your tummy, what can you know about the earth? Nada. Nada. Nada. So leave it alone as carefully as you can — that's the best policy. Some of your so-called American Indians and so-called Tibetans had the idea that what was in the earth — coal, gold, turquoise, oil — belonged to the earth, much the way your mystery of a lung belongs to you. It would not occur to those people to dig out a piece of somebody and make off with it. Only what the earth expels, arrays on its surface by itself, would they use. Should you use. Obsidian from old volcanic eruptions, chunks of gold found in quick streams — these they would feel free to use, as modest flies content themselves with shit the animal has expelled — even flies, your least esteemed companions, know better than to burrow up the anus of a stranger in search of lunch. How come flies are so smart, so polite? They don't even know about the germs they carry — not theirs, not native in them — from one pile of ordure to the next, stopping off along the way on your dinner plate.

“Christ, what a planet!” as the most perceptive of your philosophers remarked.

What would you know about the organs if you never opened the body up? That's about what you know about the earth. You know plenty. But you know it arising from inside. You know it as feeling. You know it is desire. You know it as fear. These things that you feel, you cherish them the way you cherish diamonds you steal from earth or pearls you rape from oysters. These feelings of yours are only beautiful, only useful, in the moment they arise. What they tell you *then* about the world. When Proust goes on for a million words about lost feelings, the *lost weathers* of his life, he's trying to understand now at last what he should have understood then. A feeling is full of meaning and beauty as it rises, a cloying misery afterwards, a lump to weigh you down ever after, a history.

Look at the feeling that arises. Know yourself knowing it. That's anatomy enough for the likes of you. And if you keep looking at your feelings, feeling them and beyond them and seeing what they come from and where they go, soon enough those deadly, deadly organs inside you will turn into butterflies and rainbows and leave you nimble again. Nimble as you once were, Jack, before, when you could still jump over the candlestick, still jump over the moon and go home.

Home! I hear you hearing me, your eagerness to know where home is, really is! Right here, this sacred earth you brought with you, you'll never come home to until you understand the vastness of its system, alone in space as you are, and you wander together, all of you, utterly alone together forever.

But this purgatory, this suffering silly vale of tears, this earth, you have to see it in a different way at last. If you look around you with clean eyes you'll see the earth, only the earth. It is all you have, and all you are. All of your problems arise from thinking that you are one thing and earth is another. All of your anxieties about the earth are childish fantasies, and infantile evasions of your proper responsibility.

You are the earth. It is yours, or you are its organs. It has always been with you. You brought the earth with you when you came.

You are the part of the earth that moves around. You are the part of the earth that talks to one another and sometimes helps each other out.

If you really care about the earth, as so many people comfortably say they do (and buy organic coffee and pray for the rainforest), if you really care about the earth, you'll take care of each other.

Because you are the only part of earth you can really touch, the only part of earth you are responsible for. If you love the earth, take care of each other. There is no other ecology. And if that sounds mystical, consider that if in every particular you consult the benefit and well-being of other people, all other people, no matter how many legs or wings they have or haven't, if all your actions are concerned to help other people, thoughtful, skilful, careful, there is no way you can hurt the earth.

And strong as the earth is (Bouledios said), it's up to you to be its strength. You are the earth, the only earth you have.

13 September 2003

HORAE NOVISSIMAE

A dog barks
someone
has something
on his mind

scares me
the vague
intention

*

let this book be

angel
the way a city is

*

pale urge
my young philosophy
I drink the tea
your skin leaves
light

*

could keep telling

barking

or fall quiet

morning starts

again and again

*

some times

must little

an ache

decides

divide

the old

desire

from the you

*

a penny

used to be

possibility

made still

of Venus
her metal

presently green
its value
thingly

lest even a coin
ever be less
than itself

a taste
any child knows
between the lips

the thing makes
sense the
value fades.

13 September 2003

LAST RITES

Would I know you if you were here again
a balancing animal
flowering at the window

eccentric young women at the fountain
trying to catch the sun's face in the water
to bring home to their sick fathers

art is. Everyone tries. In French
the center is always further away,
in German intimate, in English lost

in the crowd. Too many trees,
too little oxygen. Eccentric
young women carrying the moon

on their backs to bring home
to their dying father, only one, your white
arms he is thinking, your white

arms these innocent skin,
his grammar is dying too, and as it dies
it shows him what words really mean

untamed by the sentences we speak,
he speaks no more, he hears them
coming up the stairs, hears them thinking

in his head, eccentric young women
who have wandered through the streets
peeling shadows off the pavement

to bring home to their dying father,
his soft skin under the drowsy quilt,
he's lived his whole life and the skin

inside his arm looks as if nothing
ever happened to him, *nothing changes*
he remembers someone saying, about dying,

nothing changes in life in death in
everything changes, she is back home now
with what she went out looking for

the house is filled with contradictions
sunlight chattering around her
her shadow cool now on his forehead

one woman or many, one man or none,
who are you, he asks his daughter,
darling, where is my skin?

14 September 2003

Back in the days when I was Mark Twain

you mean you didn't know it was me?

somebody had to do it, it wasn't easy,
all those cigars, all those daughters, all that traveling around,

that's why I don't smoke and have no children
and love to stay at home staring at the moon

an orb singularly neglected by the great Missourian

BEFORE ROME

In my day I was a bold Etruscan
and knew the images that lead wisdom
from each thing in the world to a person
waiting
— as we called what you first called human,
groundling, contour follower.

We built the mask
so that the face would come,
wide-eyed we welcomed.

Now I shudder
to say my own name, the end of pleasure.

15 September 2003

DARE

to be the size of yourself,
Olson told me, “beware
of the sparrows who would diminish you”
he said, I accepted
the omen.

I have opened my mouth,
I have said the big thing.

Because the only energy
that lasts is moral energy
founded as it is on desire and shaped
by compassion,

let it work in me and my reader,
join us, hand in hand and language in language in body in brain,
let us be
as large as it is, and no larger.

I have been willing in other words to keep talking.

15 September 2003

THE ARROW FLYING BACKWARDS

Knowing the make up of things
be keen to honor them. Gnostic.
Things are places after all.

A raft on a small ocean —
see how a bird, a pelican
settles on one corner of it

across from you and your little
fire. The bird dries its wings
in a wind you share. Blink.

Another rapture, usually so rare,
has taken bird and raft and you away.
Who are you now? A cool

sensation on a broad back
— wind? Some kind of weather
links you to the former

stations of yourself, weather.
Le temps. You try to catch the rain
again because you love it,

the soul longing to be wet.
The danger. We think we are,
but we are only what happens.

Blink again and everything is
Byzantium in gold, vast
and civilized and gone.

15 September 2003

The balance place of quiet no

where it is always

finding the way to tell you

the space

let go inside you

on those rare cool mornings when

you happen on yourself

the way a candle

remembers its flame

sun coming over the hill.

16 September 2003

PRAYER TO SAINT THOMAS.

There are so many silences
keep asking me
fill me with your hunger
I have been too long
full of my own appalling certainties.

16 September 2003

METHOD:

Make dream spaces to trap words in.

Write with an eraser

always. Listen

to the specific silence,

silence least of all things is general.

Take words away to find more of them.

Lingua abhorret vacuum.